



ZYGOTE

As rich countries spend billions on useless technology, poor countries are left with Microsoft's scraps. Still, it will all be different after Zygoté has verified the Cybermen takeover

XP ALLEY DOSES

Next month, Microsoft will begin to sell a sick bundle of software for students and school kids, defined by the World Bank as "new users in poor countries". The bundle will consist of Windows XP Starter Edition, Office Home and Student, Microsoft Math 3.0, Learning Essentials 2.0 and Windows Live Mail. The price will be \$3 (around £1.50) for each compilation.

Zygoté is surprised by this deviation from the normal practice of harnessing underprivileged young users in emerging markets. Usually the drug-pusher hangs around the school gate and supplies the first dose of heroin for free, especially if the consignment is out of date, no longer supported and contaminated with bugs.

CALL TO ACCOUNT

Voice-over Internet Protocol is a marvellous system. It allows people to make phone calls to anywhere in the world for nothing, provided they have a web connection and a bit of free software. Unlike landlines and mobiles, VoIP has never fallen under the jurisdiction of a regulatory body, so anyone could set up as a supplier and promise anything, without fear of being brought to account.

Until now, that is. Zygoté congratulates Ofcom for taking the first steps to protect VoIP users in the UK. Under a new set of regulations, VoIP operators who

offer services to residential or business users will be subject to stringent conditions. These include enabling any user to make and receive national, international and emergency calls through a normal telephone number, continual use of the service in the event of a mains power outage and the right of the customer to retain their number if they switch service provider.

A legal expert, speaking on behalf of Ofcom, has assured Zygoté that it will take a "highly proactive approach" to monitoring and enforcing compliance, and fines of 10 per cent of turnover will be imposed on rogue VoIP operators with a view to banning them altogether if they don't get their act together. How splendid!

OVER THE TOP

The US Army began to develop computer-assisted combat equipment as far back as 1991. Soldiers were issued with all sorts of bionic gear, including a digital networking system, satellite navigation console, flip-down helmet display, power-zoom artificial eyes, electronic ID tagging, a gun-mounted camera and five kilos of batteries to keep everything powered up. In theory our allies would be able to identify the position of their buddies inside a sort of video-game display, representing the firefight going on around them. This would allow them to shoot only at targets not

identified as friendlies, such as insurgents, goats and shopkeepers. But in practice the system was too slow, inaccurate and heavy. After throwing over half a billion dollars at the project, the US quietly scrapped it a few weeks ago.

But here in the UK we are ploughing on with our own version of the system, and another two billion quid of development cash has been earmarked before its scheduled deployment in 2015. By putting technology first we are endangering our own soldiers as well as non-combatant civilians, because complex, unsuitable gizmos are being introduced for the simplest of jobs. The main justification for this idiotic waste of money is that the helmet display and gun-mounted camera will allow our soldiers to see round corners and over walls without exposing themselves.

Zygoté can remember his granddad talking about a system that did this in the First World War. It consisted of a shaving mirror on the end of a stick.

A LOAD OF BALLOTS

A fascinating report is about to be delivered to the Department for Constitutional Affairs and the Electoral Commission. The report covers the findings of a group of independent observers who have taken advantage of some new legislation. This allowed them to monitor the trial use of electronic

voting technology in last month's local elections. They watched out for obvious pitfalls such as electoral fraud and voter privacy, but they were also very interested in how the results of electronic voting can be properly verified. In other words, who checks the electronic checkers?

Zygoté asked the Electoral Commission who was eligible to be accredited. The surprise answer was: "Any individual over 16 can apply to be given automatic rights to attend any election in the UK without notice, and be an independent observer." Zygoté is over 16 so he applied. We are delighted to report that his own observations will allay any fears about the effect of computerised voting on the democratic process.

Even though sinister alien forces can hijack the sophisticated technology needed for things such as secure credit card transactions, it seems that the fiddling of an electronic ballot box is not possible, and we should all trust the results of high-tech elections implicitly. The recent local election results provided a useful pointer to the next general election, when online voting, electronic polling booths and robot tellers are going to be even more widespread.

The political map of Britain reflects this. The Daleks now hold the balance of power in Scotland, while the Borg and the Cybermen are in coalition in key marginals across the Midlands. Suspicions were raised in West Babylon-5, when Ian Paisley and Gerry Adams agreed to share power, but reports of homicidal automatons affecting the ballot were proved false. And Marvin The Paranoid Android is still Mayor of London. In other words, the introduction of computerised voting presents no threat to the democratic process whatsoever. As the incoming Prime Minister says, "Hello. Look, I have a firm hand on the tiller. You will ob-ey!" ☒

Great Moments in Computing
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234: THE SURVEILLANCE SOCIETY



The Surveillance Society was foretold by George Orwell, in his bleak dystopian novel published in 1949...



A society willingly enslaved by relentless propaganda, where everyone was subjugated by the slogan, Big Brother is Watching You



And now, boys an' girls, will ya please rearrange them last five words of the previous panel. Weyhey!!